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THE
INTELLECTUAL POSITION OF CHRISTIANS.
III.—THE FACTS OF THE CHRISTIAN
REVELATION.

BY E. M. CAILLARD.

By the facts of the Christian revelation, we mean in the first place its historical facts, and in the second place the truths which these historical facts,—if they are indeed such,—prove;—truths whose existence is as necessary to the occurrence of those facts as the existence of the English nation is necessary to the achievements accomplished by it.

(1) The moment we enter upon the domain of history, those facts which we are to believe and those facts which we are to reject must be determined by evidence. With regard to the historical facts of the Christian revelation, which one and all centre in the person of Christ, the evidence for their actual occurrence is weighty and conclusive, provided we are satisfied that it shall be of the same nature and amount as that demanded in the case of any other historical events of the same date. The so-called "Higher Criticism," and all criticism to which the books of the New Testament has been subjected, leads, finally, to this result; and the history of the discussions on the Fourth Gospel is specially instructive in this connection. But it is not within the scope of our present subject to examine them here, even were the writer qualified to do so, and those readers who desire to satisfy themselves of the accuracy of the assertion just made, must be referred to special treatises. The point most relevant to our immediate considerations, and to which, therefore, it is important to draw attention, is that the evidence for the historical facts of the Christian revelation, can only be regarded as conclusive provided we require it to be no more weighty and abundant, than that which would satisfy us of the occurrence of any other events, purporting to have taken place in the same age; provided, for example, we are willing to accept

the principal facts in the life of Christ on evidence of the same kind as satisfies us as to the occurrence of the principal events in the life of Julius Cæsar.

Now there is not the smallest doubt that a large number of persons are not ready to give in their adhesion to the truth of the Gospel records on these terms, and that for the simple reason that the Person there portrayed does not fit in with their theory of the universe as does the person of Julius Cæsar. That a great soldier and statesman should arise, lead his countrymen to victory and to prosperity, in spite of apparently overwhelming odds against him, and should be tempted by his success to grasp at and obtain the power which that success entitled him to hope for, is not indeed an everyday occurrence; but it is sufficiently frequent to excite no *a priori* incredulity, and, therefore, ordinary historical evidence is deemed sufficient to prove its truth in any particular instance. The case is different when we come to the life of Christ. If that was really what it claimed to be, it must necessarily be unique. No other such experience can ever have been in the past or will ever be in the future given to the human race. Either, therefore, we must have what is called "overwhelming" evidence of its occurrence, or the *a priori* probability of that occurrence must be so strong as to justify our accepting ordinary evidence of an event not only extraordinary but unique.

"Overwhelming" evidence in the case of any historical event, even one of comparatively recent date, is well nigh impossible to obtain. In the case of events purporting to have taken place nearly 2,000 years ago, the impossibility is not proximate but absolute. If, therefore, we are to be satisfied that the life of Christ was really such as recorded, we must be so on account of its *a priori* probability. If the truths to which it bears witness are such as in a unique degree respond to human needs and capacities, and are, moreover, such as in combination with the ascertained truths of natural science (including within this term not only the sciences of inorganic matter, and of the lower forms of life, but also those of which man himself either in his social or his individual aspect is the subject-matter), supply us with "the solution to the problem of the universe which is the fullest and most adequate, the most capable of further

development and application," then the conditions of *a priori* probability are satisfied; the Christian revelation appeals to reason as well as to faith, and we have neither right nor need to demand in its support, evidence different in kind or degree to that which we consider sufficient in other matters. Our object for the present must, therefore, be to ascertain distinctly what are the truths to which the revelation of the God-Man witnesses, without which He could not be. They may be classed under four heads:—

- (I.) The kinship of the Divine to the human.
- (II.) The personality of God.
- (III.) The existence of relation in the Godhead.
- (IV.) Sacrifice a condition of the Divine life.

These truths must first be considered in their Divine aspect, *i.e.*, as they teach us to regard God, and to this part of our subject the rest of the present essay will be devoted. Next, they must be considered in relation to the order of Nature, *i.e.*, as they show us the connexion between God and the universe; and last, they must be applied to those facts of science to which some reference has already been made, and of which a further digest will be given in its due place.

(I.) The kinship between the Divine and human natures is a necessary pre-supposition of incarnation. God could not reveal Himself in or through that which is not, so far as it goes, His true expression, and consequently, to that extent, divine. This is a truth recognized by all religions into which an incarnation enters—and they are numerous. But in endeavouring to define that kinship (and every "form" of religion is a definition of its articles of faith), two opposite errors have constantly arisen. The one is to merge the human nature in the Divine so completely that the former ceases to have any distinct existence; the other is to merge the Divine in the human and so debase it to the level of the latter. Buddhism is a notable example of the first tendency, and every mythology supplies us with illustrations of the second. The Incarnation presented to us in the Christian revelation escapes both these extremes. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His Glory, the Glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father." The distinctiveness of the Divine from the human is asserted in the very same act which most emphatically testifies to

their intimate relationship. The kinship is such, and is shewn to be such, that "God can really exist under conditions of manhood without ceasing to be or to reveal God;* and man can be taken to be the organ of Godhead without one whit ceasing to be human."†

(II.) This being the case, it seems almost superfluous to add that the Incarnation of the Christian revelation implies Personality in the Godhead. Man's most essential characteristic is his self-conscious life of intelligence and will,—in other words his personality. If, therefore, God can truly be expressed in "terms of humanity," it follows that however immeasurably the Divine life transcends the human, that life is nevertheless personal. Were it otherwise the existence of God "under conditions of manhood" would be an impossible contradiction, for the personal cannot be or reveal the impersonal.

(III.) The existence of relation in the Godhead follows necessarily upon the existence of personality, because personal life is incompatible with absolute solitude. Personal activities demand a personal object upon which they can be directed, and failing it they fail of an adequate scope. To Divine activities, a Divine object can alone suffice. Even therefore if a plurality of persons in the Godhead had not been expressly given as part of the Christian revelation, we could not have accepted the latter without implicitly accepting the former. Such a plurality has, however, been expressly given. The Triune God is the central truth on which the facts of the Christian revelation converge. To many minds it is also the central difficulty, and, therefore, however poor and inadequate the words in which an endeavour is made to place it in a clearer light, it cannot be left on one side here. The difficulty has perhaps been exaggerated by a timidity in facing it, which has mistakenly passed for a reverent unwillingness to pry into things too deep for us. It should be remembered that a revelation of God if made at all is intended to be comprehensible. It is not put forth as a mystery, but as a solution of mysteries; and though we must indeed, in all humility acknowledge that there are depths in the Divine

* Not without submitting to limitation, of course. It is not asserted that in the God-Man the whole Deity is revealed, but only so much as man can apprehend.

† "Bampton Lectures," by the Rev. Canon Gore, p. 117.

Nature for ever unfathomable by the limited plumb-line of human reason, it does not follow from this that God is unknowable. "We are not left to the frigid contemplation of the unconditioned Godhead. This indeed forms the substratum of all that we hold to be truth, the background of that related life of God which evokes our adoration and sustains our hope. But to us it is revealed that in the one unsearchable Godhead, 'dark from excess of light,' there is a threefold relationship between Three Holy Persons. If the Unity of the Divine essence be thus necessary for thought, yet inconceivable, in the Trinity of the Divine Persons we discern a God whom we can know and love—a Father who is truly Father because He has a co-eternal Son; a Son in whom we are made sons; a Holy Ghost who as He unites the Father and the Son, is likewise the bond between God and man." * This is the Christian doctrine of God, the threefold personal relationship in the undivided God; † and from it follows—what is indeed also a matter of express revelation—the fourth truth to which attention has been called :

(IV.) That sacrifice is a condition of the Divine life. In this connexion we must put away the thought that sacrifice is synonymous with suffering. Even in human experience we have more than hints towards a very different conclusion. There are sacrifices which entail only joy, and the man or the woman who has felt it "more blessed to give than to receive," will hardly need a reminder of this truth.

"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand." ‡ "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." § "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the

* "The Divine Unity and Trinity," by the Rev. Herbert H. Jeaffreson, M.A. The writer gladly takes this opportunity of recording her deep indebtedness to the author of the above work, which she earnestly commends to the study of her readers.

† Very crude and ignorant objections are sometimes made to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity by those who might be supposed to think a little more deeply than their words imply. Thus an agnostic friend of the writer, of high repute in science, once observed to her that this doctrine was absurd, because "how can three things be one thing?" Even the ordinary mathematical analogy of the triangle suffices to answer such a difficulty as this. The three sides of the triangle do not form one *side*, but one triangle, not identical with any one of the three sides, non-existent if any one of them be absent. In like manner the doctrine of the Trinity does not assert that three Persons are one *Person*, but one *God* to Whose existence each of the three Persons is essential.

‡ John iii. 35.

§ Col. i. 19.

Godhead bodily." * This is the relation of the Father to the Son,—the continual pouring forth of His own being into Him who, being Himself God, is alone able to receive the fulness and perfection of the Divine life, which fulness the Son in His turn pours back into "the bosom of the Father." † That which the Father gives to the Son is Himself; that which the Son renders to the Father is Himself, and the medium through which in each case the gift is conveyed is the third Person in the Holy Trinity, whose personality is necessitated (if we may so speak,) by the twofold personality which He conveys,—that of the Father to the Son, that of the Son to the Father. Personality as it is known to us is known in its limited human manifestation; a human being cannot, in a literal sense, give *himself*, his own personality to another, because there is between him and that other, no personal medium through which such a gift can be conveyed. ‡ In God there is not this limitation, for the personal medium exists in the Divine spirit, proceeding equally from the Father and from the Son. "The personal spirit of God conveys the spiritual essence of God."

Thus in the Triune God of the Christian revelation we are taught to see God as "full of action and movement within Himself, and therefore not merely an unsearchable abyss into which no eye can penetrate; but a God at whom we can gaze with some understanding of His life." Yet at the same time the complementary truth is insisted on "of an awful abyss of the unsearchable Godhead; for behind the three Divine Persons, whom we can understand, there lies the unknowable Infinity of the Divine Unity of Nature." § The element of truth to which agnosticism witnesses is therefore fully recognised in the Christian revelation,—only it is not allowed to cover the whole ground. That which God has unveiled concerning Himself, man is taught to regard as lawful to contemplate and possible to apprehend.

* Col. ii. 9.

† John i.

‡ The nearest approach to such a gift is, of course, the life—personal since it develops into personality—which every child receives through the double agency of its father and mother. Yet even in this case, it is not personality which is bestowed, but that which will develop into personality. The parents give of their own, but not themselves.

§ The Divine Unity and Trinity, p. 3; *Ibid*, p. 104.